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ABSTRACT

The traditional treatment of literary texts in Slovene schools took place in the form of a search for the "true message" of the literary work. The new Slovene literary didactics assumes that the teacher no longer explains to the student the meaning of this or that literary work. Rather he/she knows that the literary work can be comprehended only within the range of the immanent horizon of expectation. The teacher can provide the structure, the directions, and the possibilities or outlines (for discussion about literature), but the real link in the literary class is the link between the author and the reader. Full reception does require the understanding of the literary work, the perception of a large enough number of textual indicators--too large a gap between the author's and reader's code of comprehension can prevent or at least reduce the intensity of the literary aesthetic experience. A study explored the perception of the cause-effect relationship in the reception of the fairy tale in the period of concrete intellectual operations. Of the children questioned about "The Golden Bird" by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, only 68% perceived and understood the cause-effect relationship and completed a task with sentence parts correctly. Findings show that the perception of cause-effect relationships between motifs necessitates a certain level of syntactic-linguistic development, which not all children attain at the same time. (Contains 19 notes and 13 references.) (NKA)

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THE PERCEPTION OF THE CAUSE-EFFECT RELATIONSHIP AMONG FAIRY-TALE MOTIFS

Not long ago, the treatment of literary texts in Slovene schools was limited to the search for the author's message, namely to "what the author wished to convey", to "what the main idea of the work was, and to "what have we learnt from the work today." And there was also no doubt that the teacher would be the one who would explain to the pupils what the writer's intended meaning was. From this standpoint, it is possible to draw two mental premises:
1 that reading literature is actually a dialogue between the author and the reader, and
2 that a kind of ideal meaning exists for each literary work, which now and then is accessible to the straight-A student, but in most cases it is only the teacher who can grasp it.

Modern literary theory has come to a conclusion that neither approach is entirely adequate. Reading and the reception of literature take place in the communicative situation, which is far away from the author (and his conveying of the message) - communication in the sense of space as well as place. The reader thus does not communicate with the writer/ poet, but with his work. There is no doubt that the more educated readers will characteristically recognize the author's literary-historical, stylistic and biographical context, but it is also indisputable that the reception of the literary text itself is possible (even) without such knowledge. Actually, in real life most situations of reception take place without the awareness of literary-historical data or other data from literary sciences. This is the case especially in the reading of children's literature, where e.g. most readers know hardly anything about Carl Collodi, but almost everybody knows Pinnochio. Most Slovene children know Ciciban all too well, but there are only few who are familiar with Župančič; and last but not least: none of us knows anything about the authors of folk tales, even though almost each and every one of us listened to them throughout the major part in our childhood.

The other premise, deduced from "traditional literary didactics", is the belief in the existence of one sole true meaning of the literary text, for which traditional literary theory claimed that it

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was constant, given with the creation of the literature itself. Or in other words: the author furnishes the work with a meaning which later on goes through no changes. The Constance School of Literary History (H. R. Jauss) on the other hand doubted in the constancy of the literary meaning. It introduced the category of a relative meaning and claimed that the meaning of the literary text reached concretization during each contact between the reader and the text. Meanings that emerge in that way, naturally, cannot always be the same. Based on this assumption the *esthetics of reception*[1] derived a theory on the meaning of the literary text. Such meaning thus emerges in the productive overlapping of the semantic field of the literary work and the reader's immanent field of expectation, the so-called *horizon of expectation*. In other words, this is the convergence of text and reception, which can be perceived solely through the historical changeability of its concretizations.

Findings from the reception of esthetics were rather late in reaching Slovene literary theory. And it has been only recently that we can speak of the so-called "student centred approach" being applied here. By "student centred approach" we mean[2] Morgan's *flexible didactics*, which accounts for both: the dynamics of the individual student as well as that of the group. The new Slovene literary didactics assumes that the teacher no longer explains to the student the meaning of this or that literary work. Rather he knows that the literary work can be comprehended only within the range of the immanent horizon of expectation. This means that only those segments of literature are understood which correspond to the readers' lives, their own experiences. Or as Dan Morgan[3] put it: "By 'student centred' I mean enabling the students to express their conclusions, decisions, explanations, comments, disagreements, their sincere reactions related to the discussed literature. The teacher can provide the structure, the directions and the possibilities or outlines (for discussion about literature), but the real link in the literary class is, and we should not forget this, the link between the author and the reader. The reader's own moral and esthetic upbringing together with the author as the interpreter are therefore of vital importance: the author invites the reader to reflect on life and human nature. The teacher should, naturally, keep his own interpretation to himself. On the other hand he should not only *allow* the student's interpretation but also encourage it. Slovene literary didactics[4] has come even further in dealing with the problem of constituting meaning: it has established that the limitations of the readers' horizon of expectations are

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[1] Jauss, H. R. (1978): *Estetika recepcije* (The Esthetics of Reception). Beograd.
[2] Morgan, D. (1993): "Connecting Literature to Students' Lives. College English." Vol 55. Number 5. pp. 491-500
[3] Ibid. pp. 495-496.
[4] Saksida, I. (1992): *Mladinska književnost na razredni stopnji osnovne šole* (Children's Literature in the First Four Grades of Primary School). Ljubljana. Saksida, I. (1994): *Izhodišča in modeli šolske interpretacije* (The Starting Points and models of School Interpretation). Ljubljana. Kordigel, M. (1994): *Mladinska književnost, otroci in učitelji* (Children's Literature, the Children and the Teachers). Ljubljana.

not framed solely by the range of the reader's experience (social or individual), but also with his cognitive and linguistic development.

In his research dealing with the borderline area between children's and non-children's literature,[5] Igor Saksida thus observes that it is possible to read children's literature in two ways, namely:

- the "child's way", where the (young) reader constitutes the meaning of the text at the concrete level, which means that he does not generalize the "concrete" motifs verbalized in literature; he does not connect them with the broader generic reality, and
- in the "adult('s) way", where the reader does not perceive the text at the concrete level, but is able to comprehend the verbalized "concrete" motifs as signals of the broader generic reality.

Various interpretations (and with this the constituting of different meanings) thus emerge due to the fact that the horizon of expectations in the adult and in the child differ among each other not only in how well or not one and the other is informed about what the world is like, namely about the amount of so-called life experiences, but also about the capability or incapability of generalization and abstract thought.

The theory of reading *points out* that the literary-esthetic experience can be more or less perfect and that the quality of the literary esthetic experience is determined by the readers' ability to decipher textual signals, indicators which the author had embedded into the text so that the reader could constitute a meaning which would be as close as possible to the author's intended meaning.

In other words: *the more the text consists of signals which do not correspond to the contents in the readers' immanent visual field of expectations, the more the meaning, concretized in the course of reception, will differ from the one defined by the author.*

Up till now, we have among *signals which have no correspondence in the readers' consciousness* mentioned those

- which cannot be linked with the corresponding emotional experiences from real life, and those,
- which cannot be registered due to the absence of the capability of generalization and abstract thought.

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At this point we should mention the difficulties which occur when one attempts to concretize meaning. Already traditional literary didactics observed their existence in cases where the reader (child) was not familiar with the linguistic means the author had employed in the verbalizing of his literary world. For this reason, the almost obligatory didactic step in school was to explain the "unknown words", a step which in the traditional concept came after each reading. Modern literary didactics (in principle) does claim that seeking dictionary definitions for each word is not *that* important for the reception and constitution of meaning in children's literature (since many of them, especially in poetry, function primarily through their sound, magic and their comicality). However, it is aware of the fact that full reception does require the understanding of the literary work, the perception of a large enough number of textual indicators and that a too large a gap between the author's and reader's code of comprehension can prevent or at least strongly reduce the intensity of the literary esthetic experience.

A limited vocabulary is not the only segment of linguistic development which can prevent the (young) reader from perceiving the signals, embedded in the text so that he can reconstruct the literary meaning. A relatively low level of linguistic development, too, can result in the lack of comprehension of those logical structures, since the reader has no linguistic pattern to place them in and thus cannot recall them into (his) memory.

In the present study we are primarily interested in the perception of the cause-effect relationship in the reception of the fairy tale in the period of concrete intellectual operations.

Children receive fairy tales already in the pre-operative period of their cognitive development. However, the perception of the cause-effect relationship is not a necessity for the understanding and constructing of the meaning required for this period of reading development. It is typical of the reception of the fairy tale in the so-called "fairy-tale period" that the reader is completely absorbed in the eidetic representation of time, space and action of the events, in which the protagonists are involved in individual "sequences or scenes". The theory of the young reader speaks of the so-called *travelling imagination*, which is characteristic of this period of the child's development. It is an imagination which is not capable of following the extremely complicated changes in the action's time and space, that

[5] Saksida, I (1991): "Nekaj vprašanj iz teorije mladinske literature (A Few Questions from the Theory of Children's Literature)". In: Otrok in knjiga. Maribor.

we encounter in e.g. adult literature[6]. Nor do we find cause-effect relationships between individual textual sequences here.

Actually we can hardly find condensed action (activity directed toward a specific goal, whether the gaol is in the end reached or not) in fairy tales. The most common compositional type offers merely a sequence of the hero's events, individual epizodes, which are usually linked only by a temporal sequence and by the fact that they occur to the same literary person. It is thus sufficient for the understanding and reconstruction of the meaning that the child in the fairy-tale period of his reading development concentrates only on the event (that) the narrator is speaking about at a given moment. All that had happened before that and what still might happen afterwards (thus the cause and effect) are of no interest to him nor could they be, since the exceptionality and the intriguing nature of the "present" event completely occupies him, mentally as well as emotionally[7].

Reading in a later period, naturally, develops toward the ability to exceed complete mental and emotional concentration on the reception of one sole motif, toward the ability of maintaining the amount of mental energy which enables the reader to cover a larger number of motifs and furtheron the concretization of those textual meanings which can be derived from the relations between those motifs.

One of the potential possibilities given by the simultaneous perception of a larger number of motifs is the ***understanding of cause-effect relationships between individual sequences of the action(s) in the fairy-tale text*** - a possibility which is not accessible to the child in the fairy-tale period of his reading development, and for which we have up till now claimed that it should be accessible to the young reader already in his period of concrete intellectual operations. That this is not entirely the case can be deduced from the results arrived at in a research performed at the Faculty of Education in Maribor entitled: *The Fairy Tale Liberates the Child*,[8] in which we observed how Slovene second graders (8 years) read fairy tales, and if they still needed them. Among other things we were interested in whether children perceive the cause-effect relationship of the fairy-tale motifs and if the registering of this textual element had any influence on how the second-graders in question did in school.

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[6] Buehler, Ch. (1918): "Das Maerchen und die Phantasie des Kindes". In: Zeitshrift fuer angewandte Psychologie. Leipzig.
[7] Kordigel, M. (1991): "Pravljica in otroška fantazija in kako je postalo razmišljanje Charlotte Buehler za književno vzgojo aktualnejše kot je bilo kdajkoli poprej. (The Fairy tale and the Child's Imagination, and how the reflections by Ch. Buehler became more popular than they ever were before)." In: Otrok in knjiga. Ljubljana.
[8] Mlaker, S. (1994): Pravljica osvobaja otroka (The Fairy Tale Liberates the Child). Diploma Work. Faculty of Education. Maribor.

The experiment was based on the fairy tale *The Golden Bird* [9] by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. It is a classical fairy tale about three brothers who set out to solve the same task. In accordance with the a priori harmony of all realizations and with the ontological principles which are obligatory for the fairy tale, the task is accomplished by the youngest brother, because (just like the reader) he, too, is small and defenceless, but honest and good. One of the experimental tasks required of the students was to perceive and comprehend the cause-effect sequence in that part of the story which speaks of how the youngest brother, despite (the) specific orders from the Fox not to, took the golden bird from the wooden cage and placed it into the golden one. By doing this he scared the bird so much that it made a noise which woke up the guards. The guards then grabbed the boy and threw him into prison.

The children's task was to place the following parts of sentences into the correct cause-effect order:

- the bird made a noise
- the youngest brother is in jail
- the soldiers/ guards wake up
- the youngest brother takes the bird out of one cage and puts it into another.

The results showed that only 68 % of the questioned children perceived and understood the cause-effect relationship and completed the task correctly. As much as 32 % of them were not capable of doing this.[10] It should be stressed that this was not too difficult a task since the tale itself included the hindering device, namely "prohibitions, commandments and prophesies", a means by which the narrator helps the recipient to perceive the textual signals more easily, and constitute the meaning in such a manner that the events which will be the **consequence** of a specific action are something that could be predicted (in advance): " I shall repeat the directions one more time. Keep walking straight ahead and you will come to a castle in front of which lie a troop of soldiers. Do not pay (any) attention to them, because they will be sleeping and snoring; go through among them directly towards the castle. Go through the chambers and the end you will reach one in which you will find a golden bird in a wooden cage. On one side of it you will find an empty golden cage. But beware! Do not take the bird out of the poorer cage and put it into the richer one, as misfortune will come over you."[11] the Fox warned the youngest brother. But prohibitions in traditional stories are there

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[9] Grimm, J. & W. (1993): Zlata ptica (The Golden Bird). In: Grimmove pravljice. Prva knjiga zbranih pravljic. Ljubljana

[10] Mlaker, S. (1994): Pravljica osvobaja otroka. Diploma Work. Maribor. p. 94.

[11] Grimm, J. & W. (1993): Zlata ptica (The Golden Bird). In: Grimmove pravljice. Prva knjiga zbranih pravljic. Ljubljana. pp. 297-298.

to be broken. The youngest brother will do exactly what he was warned against. This means that the perception of the cause-effect interdependence of motifs is enhanced already with the double repetition, which is characteristic of the fairy-tale structure.

Already just by observing the fairy-tale structure we can see that the perception of the cause-effect relationship among individual motifs is independent of the number of its repetitions.

The mentioned experiment has provided proof for such a claim. It (the experiment) took place simultaneously in two second grades, the only difference between them being the number of times the fairy-tale text was repeated to the pupils. While the pupils of one class heard the tale *Golden Bird* only once, the pupils of the other class were first narrated the tale (which according to the theory of suggestiveness of live narrations arouses the most intense literary-esthetic experience) and then read. At home, the children heard the story (read or narrated) again from their parents. They then read the tale themselves and finally listened to it on tape.

Arrange the parts of sentences in to the correct cause-effect order:

CLASS	A (children who only once)	heard the tale	B (children who the tale five	read/heard the times)
	f	%	f	%
correct	15	68	13	68
incorrect	7	32	6	32
Together	**22**	**100**	**19**	**100**

The results of testing the perception and comprehension of cause-effect relationships show that there is hardly any difference between both groups of tested children. The number of repetitions in the experiment did not increase the perception of the type of motivational process. This means that regardless of how many times the children encounter the sequence of motifs, the cause-effect relationship remains overlooked.

Thus if the number of repetitions does not enhance the capacity for perceiving the cause-effect relationship among motifs, this probably means that the child WITH SUCH TYPE OF

LOGICAL STRUCTURE is NOT CAPABLE of registering - possibly because he has not (yet) developed a linguistic structure, through which he could perceive and comprehend it.

At this point we should say a few words about the link between language and the capacity of thought (especially abstract): The relationship language vs. thought, namely the connection of linguistic development with (the) development of mental operations, especially those related to abstract thought and the creation of notions, and the role of language in man's cognition[12] - these are old philosophical questions which are today (also empirically) dealt with by the sciences of psychology and linguistics.

Presently, we include among linguistic abilities besides linguistic competence and communicative competence also analytical competence. The idea of analytical competence places special emphasis on the functions of the linguistic structure in cognitive processes. J. S. Brunner claims that communicative competence encompasses the findings of Piaget's concrete operations in which language is a means of expression and the representation of the structure of the *concrete* opinion/thought about things. "The important discovery in language as a means of thought is not in the fact that with its help we can transfer the activity or representation into a new chain of words and sentences. Language is a new medium which allows us to transform that which we have translated into a new and more efficient form. We could not have done this by any other means. **The linguistic rules of formation and their combinatorial richness is a potential means for use, which enables us to exceed the limits of experience**" (Brunner 1975: 74)[13]

Brunner defines the *analytical capacity* as one which "enables 'prolonged' mental operations on the basis of linguistic representation and syntactic structure. It is linked with the processes of thinking and of problem solving which do not refer to experiences with concrete objects, but to groups of statements" (ibid: 72).[14]

D.R. Olson distinguishes between two different usages of language, namely the sentence as a description of perception and the sentence as proposition. With proposition he means the sentence which is in applicative relationship toward another sentence. In his opinion, the use of language as a description of performance comes developmentally before the use of language as proposition, which is the basis of formal deductive thinking /thought.[15]

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[12] Gnamuš-Kunst, O. (1979): *Vloga jezika v spoznavnem razvoju šolskega otroka.* (The Role of Language in the Cognitive Development of a School Child). Ljubljana. p. 100.
[13] Ibid. p. 87
[14] Ibid. p. 87.
[15] Ibid. p. 87.

The process of cognition is thus dependent also on linguistic development. At this point we are faced with the problem of linguistic deficiency, which is especially apparent in the use of abstract linguistic means.[16]

U. Oevermann in his *Sprache und soziale Herkunst* explains the interdependence between the cognitive and the linguistic development in the following way:
1 the control of specific linguistic syntactic means/ tools enables the development of some cognitive capacities. This link is realized in the process of speech development
2 People with an insufficiently developed general intelligence are not capable of completing individual linguistic tasks, since they had not developed all of their cognitive operations.[17]

The key to understanding why some children do perceive the cause-effect logical relationship, regardless of the number of repetitions, while others do not, should be sought in the more or less (successful) rapid linguistic development. The latter is (according to Basil Bernstein's theory) dependent primarily on the stimulating or non-stimulating character of the child's social surrounding, on whether the child lives in a linguistically privileged social surrounding (applying a developed linguistic code) or in a linguistically deprived environment (which uses a limited code). Since some of the essential differences between the limited and developed code are in the fact that the latter uses for the verbalization of reality syntactically complicated sentences with numerous conjunctions and subordinations, and the former uses only short, grammatically simplified sentences with poor syntactic structures and few conjunctions for the verbalization of the same reality. And since it is the syntactic level that significantly establishes itself in the development of the child's cognitive operations, it is safe to assume that the third of the students who were not able to arrange the parts of sentences into the correct cause-effect structure, were not familiar with the linguistic and grammatical means for the expression of the cause-effect relationship and that they thus cannot reach the level of cognitive development needed for this.

A whole series of studies showed that the child's speech development/ speech developed in the child is an important factor in the way he did at school and that the latter is more closely related to verbal capacities than to non-verbal intelligence.[18] We could test the correctness of the above mentioned realizations if we compared the successfulness in the arranging of

[16] Ibid. p. 58.
[17] Ibid. p. 103.
[18] Ibid. p. 19.

the excerpts of sentences into correct logical structures with the success in school of the secondgraders (who participated) in our test.[19] The results are very straightforward:

- all straight A students solved the task correctly;
- as few as 57 % of B students (only half of them solved the task);
- none of the C students solved the task, which means that none of them perceived the cause-effect structure.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that children in their pre-operative period of their reading development do not employ all their mental energy for the perception of individual motifs, and would thus be expected to perceive also those textual segments which exceed the framework of one motif, we have established that this is not the case. The perception of cause-effect relationships between motifs necessitates a certain level of syntactic-linguistic development. Children, whose weak success in school indicates a lower level of verbal intelligence have not yet reached that linguistic level.

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[19] Mlaker S. (1994): Pravljica osvobaja otroka. Diploma Work. Maribor. p. 97.

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Summary

The traditional treatment of literary texts in Slovene schools took place in the form of a search for the "true message" of the literary work. Such attitude is from the point of view of new literary didactics misleading also because it is based on the supposition that, during reading, a dialogue between the author and the reader takes place and not between the reader and the literary work. New literary theories have besides this established that the meaning of the literary work is never constant: it emerges (anew) with every productive overlapping of the semantic field of the text and the reader's horizon of expectations. The intensity of the literary experience correlates with the number of perceived indicators which had been embedded into the text by the author in order for the reader to decipher them. Different readers will perceive different quantities and different types of textual signals. The manner in which they are perceived is determined by the specific and individual horizon of expectations characteristic of the reader's (social) stratum, since most people comprehend literature only to the degree to which it corresponds with their personal experience. The perceiving of textual signals is determined also by the reader's cognitive competence, with his ability of generalizing and abstract thought, and by this with the ability to perceive literary motifs as signals of some broader generic reality. It is determined also with recognizing the

code and with the ability of mentally transgressing eidetic representations in the framework of one sole motif and the perception of cause-effect (and other) relationships.

The latter ability should already be developed in the child by the beginning of his operative period. However, recent discoveries have shown that a third of second-graders (8 years) are not capable of perceiving the cause-effect relationship. It has also been established that these results do not change in accordance with the number of repetitions of the receptive situation. We might assume that these children had not yet developed a linguistic and cognitive pattern in which they could embed the mentioned structure. However, the established fact that there is a high correlation between verbal intelligence (and thus a high level of linguistic development) and the success in school enables us to prove the above mentioned statement by means of its correlation with success in school.